

Reflective Practice Portfolio

Service Learning

and

Making Art with Meaning

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Art Education

July 2011

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Service Learning and Making Art with Meaning

Julie Stoppel

Chapter 1: Introduction

My Biography

Teaching wasn't my first love; it was shoes. But after being in the shoe business for eighteen years I realized I wanted to do something more important and meaningful with my life. So my husband and I sold everything and moved with our two-year-old daughter to Northern Michigan. One winter evening we went to "Twelfth Night", an evening sponsored by SeeNorth, a science and environmental education group. On this night, the animals can talk. As we walked through the forest, a bear, a raccoon, a woodpecker and others came out and told their stories. I was hooked. The very next day I called the organization to volunteer. I would do anything. Instead, they hired me to be an environmental educator. This was an incubator of ideas for me. They did everything right, involving kids in hands on experiences, learning through play and the arts. That is when I understood my calling. I would teach. When I needed to find daycare for my daughter, I heard a woman was starting a new preschool called Music, Magic and Make Believe, a program based on the arts. When I called, the woman said they had everything all together to start but they were looking for an Art teacher. I blurted out, "I'm an Art Teacher!" And so that is what I became. I had a degree in Art History from Michigan State University, so I wasn't completely ignorant about art. Though Pam never did start the daycare, she was the music teacher at the brand new Concord Academy Petoskey and they were also looking for an art teacher. That fall, I

started at their sister school in Boyne City teaching Kindergarten through 12th grade Art while working on my teaching certification. Ten years later, I would earn an Eddi Award, Northern Michigan's highest honor for people in the arts, for teaching. I made the switch to the larger Concord in Petoskey four years ago where I teach Kindergarten through sixth grade Art. After school I direct two improvisational acting troupes that perform throughout Northern Michigan.

My family has grown and grown up in those years. My daughter, Hannah (20) is about to graduate from MSU in Creative Writing. She is also an actress and musician. My younger daughter, Petra is an award-winning animator though only sixteen. She will play the lead in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* this spring. My son, Jonah (13) is involved in dance and improvisational theater. My husband, Joel, teaches drawing at the community college and is a builder and musician.

The School

In Northern Michigan, right on the shores of Lake Michigan is the small tourist town of Petoskey, the hub of cultural activity for a two county area. Sitting on a hill overlooking the beautiful rural outskirts of Petoskey, you will find Concord Academy Petoskey. Concord Petoskey is a fine arts emphasis charter school where students receive outstanding academic instruction integrated with the arts. When walking through the halls you are likely to see dancers choreographing in the octagon, hear music coming from several directions and witness high school students helping elementary students learn math. Down the hall the students are working on their next production, a dance concert of Greek Myths,

choreographed by two students, complete with original masks. The hallways are filled with artworks based on the cultures the students are currently studying.

The teachers collaborate on big and small projects to make the arts help the academics come alive. Last year our fifth graders performed Northwest Indian tales using music they wrote and performed, dances they choreographed and masklike headdresses they created which became a living totem pole. Done in conjunction with their unit on Native Americans in social studies, the students learned about the culture through the arts. Our philosophy is that children learn best when the greatest number of connections can be made. Students spend at least one third of their day in arts-based classes. For example, a fifth grader has Dance three times a week, Fine Art four times, drama three times, Choir twice and Band everyday. All classrooms are age splits so that older students act as mentors to the younger students. Each student stays with a teacher two years to help foster strong relationships. In addition, each child belongs to a council that is made up of all age groups. These councils have bi- monthly activities together. Four times a year we have school Sharings where students are able to showcase their talents. After school the students are able to participate in improvisational theater, traveling dance companies, Concord Music and Movement, Jazz band or a select choir. The school has won many awards for both academic and artistic excellence. This fall Concord Academy Petoskey will be honored as a “School of Excellence” by the State of Michigan.

My Classroom

My art room is a safe place to experience and create art but also to learn to problem solve, interact with others and make connections. My number one rule is ‘never say

anything negative about another student's artwork.' I give students the opportunity to create with a myriad of materials and techniques. This gives everyone the chance to discover a medium that they love. To make Art History approachable and fun I impersonate famous artists for a day or two at a time. This entails not just dressing up like a particular artist but also finding out fun and interesting anecdotes about their lives so I can really get in character. I have been Picasso, Hokusai, Mary Cassatt, Louise Nevelson, Matisse, Andy Warhol, John Mufangeo, John Singleton Copley among many others. I try to do this about six times a year. Most of my projects connect to our school-wide theme or to the academic curriculum. We do a lot of cross-curricular projects such as our ballet with the 5th and 6th graders based on an Aztec myth. While learning about the Aztecs, the students created 8-foot puppets and other props based on Aztec art. They composed original music and worked with the dance teacher creating choreography. The language arts teacher helped them with a narrated slide show to set the scene before the show. The product was an unforgettable collaboration that was created by the students. Each student keeps a portfolio to use for written reflection on his or her process and for selection for several shows within and without Concord. All work is displayed in the halls and several opportunities to show in the community and in more selective events occur during the year.

So if you find yourself in Northern Michigan, stop by. This fall you will find me in my new room at the front of the school. Just turn left at the foyer, through the student art gallery and into "The Studio", a unique room divided into a clay area, a printmaking station, an art library, an animation station, a film studio, and two classroom spaces. We would love to show you around!

Chapter 2: Service Learning- More Than Doing Good

An excited voice greets the teacher as she enters the room, “ Mrs. Stoppel, are we working with the kindergarten today?” Ever since the fifth and sixth grade students started their service learning project with the kindergarten, it has been the same thing, the students from both classrooms look forward to their shared experience, their shared learning. This excitement is not unique to this classroom but with all of the students that are working on different service learning projects at Concord Academy Petoskey. Today these students are painting papers with the kindergarten that will be used for collage artwork in a calendar. Not just any calendar but “Calendar for Cows”, a calendar to benefit the work of ‘Heifer, International,’ a charity that matches livestock animals with poor families from around the world. The students are working in groups to create a collage of one of the types of animals Heifer gives away. The older students have already visited the kindergarten classroom to talk to the younger students about hunger and Heifer. Time was spent reading picture books provided by Heifer aloud to the class. Together they have worked to compose a picture of their chosen animal. The kindergarten joined the fifth and sixth graders in the art room to create painted, splattered, sponged and scrapped papers from which to create their collages.

“The best part of this lesson is the sharing of ideas,” says Becca. Becca was amazed at how much her five-year-old friend already knew. She was expecting this project to be driven by the older students but found out the kindergarteners knew a lot about painting techniques and drawing animals. Sixth grader Becca and Kindergartener Olivia had quite a discussion about all the things a sheep could provide a family. My favorite part of their process was when

they decided their sheep could be pink because they were making “art”. They decided to add black and white curls to their border just in case we didn’t get it. The completed piece is an artwork they can both be proud of.

Content and Purpose

During the fall of 2010, I took a class called AE767 or Critical Analysis of Multicultural Art Education taught by Dr. Karen Hutzal. I made my decision to take my Master’s based on the name of this class. My interest has always been in the integration of the arts into the mainstream curriculum. I believed this class would be about world cultures. Imagine my surprise when this class was really about doing service-learning projects with your students. While it is true that we learned about a broader definition of multiculturalism than I anticipated, our main focus was these projects. Surprised as I was, an even bigger surprise was yet in store for me. Not only would I complete one service learning project but three projects that fall and service learning would become a continuing part of my curriculum. I choose to write about this class because I believe this class has caused the biggest change in my curriculum design and my idea of what art can teach to students.

AE 767 was set up so each week we would have a variety of readings and videos on a specific aspect of multiculturalism in America. These topics included culture and pluralism, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, language and geography, sex and gender, religion and family, exceptionality and age. Our text, *Multicultural Education in a Pluralistic Society* (2009) by Donna Gollnick and Philip Chinn had a good overview of each topic and questions for reflection to help focus your perceptions. We would then respond to questions on the discussion board that were posed by Dr. Hutzal about that week’s topic.

These questions would connect our week's topic to our teaching practice. We were expected to reply to at least one other student's response. No one could stop at just one. These discussions would often become lively debate about the chosen topic. Particularly inspiring was a video called, *Starting Small: Teaching Children about Tolerance* (Teaching Tolerance, 1997). I was moved by the classroom teacher that had her young students build a ramp so they could have a woman in a wheelchair visit their classroom. Another especially spirited discussion was the one about language. Our class was very diverse in geography with students from the South, Northwest, Midwest and West Coast. Several of the teachers are middle class white women teaching in multiracial settings. All of us had had experiences with stereotyping based on language whether we were on the receiving end because of our accents or the ones doing the stereotyping. After watching the video, *American Tongues* (Alvarez & Kolker, 1988), I realized how difficult it would be for a child who speaks one way at home, such as an African American child speaking Ebonics, and then the same child is required to follow different set of language rules at school. No wonder many of these students deal with self esteem issues. When they enter school, they are immediately corrected for speaking in the way they were taught. Another issue that was close to me was that of gender. Though there have been many positive changes in my lifetime, we still live in a society where heterosexual males have an advantage. The video, *Persistent Women* (Velarde, 1999) showed how woman artists struggled and made it with their unrelenting focus. While all of these discussions were engaging, the part of the class that most changed my teaching was the part I was not anticipating, service-learning.

The service learning part of the class encompassed writing a service-learning lesson plan that would be implemented during our ten-week class. We had many writings on the topic.

The one that was influential to me was “Becoming a Good Citizen”, a chapter from Service-Learning Companion (Duncan & Kopperud, 2007). I passed this writing along to the other teachers at our school. This chapter dealt with how you can use service learning to teach teambuilding, leadership, values, ethics and citizenship. As part of the guidelines of the class, our service-learning lesson would be reciprocal with another cultural group either within or outside our school community. The projects that our class of teachers came up with were as diverse as our group ranging from painted bandanas for Humane Society dogs to a flowerpot garden for their school. We completed the course by writing a reflective paper about the experience. We shared these papers along with images of our project with our classmates.

Beliefs and Values

The National Society for Experiential Education (Billig & Weah., 2000) has defined service learning as “any carefully monitored service experience in which a student has intentional learning goals and reflects actively on what he or she is learning throughout the experience.” Service learning is a wonderful way to engage students in real world opportunities. As students enter middle school they tend to become more “me” oriented and forget about the larger world. I want to give the students an experience that will take them out of their zone to look at a real world concern. Service learning does that. Service learning is a great fit for Concord Academy. The tenets of the Concord Creed, honesty, unselfishness, kindness, consideration, respect, generosity and forgiveness, are activated during the process. As the students learn about an issue, they are learning how to act like responsible citizens of the world.

Lesson Plan and Unit Development

For the AE767 class I choose to do a calendar with two groups of students, my self-absorbed fifth and sixth graders and my energetic kindergarteners. I figured they would have a lot to learn from each other. We decided to donate our proceeds to Heifer, International, a charity that provides livestock animals to needy families around the world. That made the subject of the calendar the easy part. It would be of farm animals. Besides, kindergarteners love drawing animals! Now, what can we do that will be engaging for both groups? We threw out a lot of ideas that were too easy for the older students or too exacting for the kindergarteners. But then we hit on the perfect idea; since kindergarteners love to paint, we would do Eric Carle style collages based on the drawings of the kindergarteners. The little ones would paint the papers and the older students would create the collages. Our biggest challenge came at the beginning of the project. Our idea was to go into the kindergarten and introduce the project. We would show a short video about Heifer, International and then read the books provided by Heifer to small groups, one student reader to 6 kids. Then we would have each kindergartener draw one of the animals that Heifer donates to poor families. Our problem was not anticipating the excitement for the younger students caused by having the “big” kids in their room. Trying to calm them down to read to them was too much. We should have started with a more active introduction maybe acting as animals or a puppet show. The drawing part went much better and the older students were amazed by the results. Thankfully, once we got the kindergarteners to the art room a few days later, we had a very dynamic activity planned. They would be creating the painted papers for our collages. Each of the thirteen collages would be worked on by one kindergartener and one or two older students. The older

students had set up the room with a sponge paint table, a printing table, a scratch and scrapping table and a splatter paint table. This activity was great fun as the students bonded with each other over the ensuing mess. During the next few days the older students created the collages based on their collaboration with the kindergarten. Many of the students made the collages right on top of the Kindergarten drawings; others choose to keep the drawings for reference. Left over painted papers were used to make a unifying border around each collage. These collages in turn became a wonderful calendar called "Calendar for Cows". We had the calendar professionally printed, which did cost more than we anticipated but we sold enough to make it worthwhile.

My biggest problem was in the fall of 2010 I taught art to three classes of fifth and sixth graders. It didn't seem right that just one class got to have such a great experience. Besides, there were two kindergartens even if I didn't teach one of them. So to be fair, while taking the OSU class, AE767 Multicultural Art, I decided to provide a service learning experience for each of these classes.

The second project looked at "Ten Ways You Can Help the Earth". The Fifth and sixth graders brainstormed how Kindergarteners can help the earth. Groups of three students made posters about their ideas. These ideas included turning off the lights, biking to school, composting, recycling and more. The students presented their posters to the Kindergarten. This went better than the small group reading did. The kindergarteners were interested to see each new poster probably because the older students had made them. Later the posters hung in the main hallway of the school so everyone got a lesson in stewardship. Together the fifth and sixth graders and the kindergarten made two murals made out of recycled

materials. Half of each class worked on a mural simultaneously in the art room. One mural is an abstract piece made of plastic bottle and marker caps glued on a painted 4'x4' piece of plywood. The second is a collage based on the work of contemporary African American artist, Mark Bradford. The older students lay down a raised motif of figures with glue on a 4'x4' piece of plywood. After letting this dry, the kindergarten collaged over the motif with colored magazine pictures found in the recycle bin. A second coat of plain newspaper squares was put on over the colored paper. These squares were put on in curving "paths" or "roads". The older students tried sandpapering the collage to reveal the initial motif of figures but decided it needed more oomph so they had the kindergarteners rub crayon over the raised areas. The lesson went extremely well because the older students were well organized and enjoyed interacting with the younger students. When the artwork was finished, the murals hung side by side in "The Octagon," the central area of the school. At our annual art fundraiser, they were auctioned off for over \$200. One of the buyers, who is the wife of an architect called her bottle cap mural the best "outsider" art in her collection and hung it in her living room.

The last group of fifth and sixth grade students did their project about school stereotypes. They spent a class period discussing these stereotypes and the idea of "bias". We brainstormed some typical stereotypes in a school setting. The students came up with many ideas that we narrowed down to jocks, nerds, Goths, rich kids, and bullies. They made posters with words describing these stereotypes. Then we discussed whether anyone fit perfectly into the descriptions we had made. We talked about how people are unfairly judged by the way they look. Video clips were shown of the popular TV show, *Glee*, to see how the writers rely on stereotypes. The students got into groups whose assignment was

to depict a specific school stereotype but these stereotypes will transcend or break their description or definition. Each student in the group would create a silhouette that relates to the other silhouettes in their group. An exhibit was created of these life-size silhouettes that showed school stereotypes and how real people don't fit into neat packages. This artwork was based on the work of contemporary African American artist, Kara Walker, whose work in silhouettes reflects the stereotypes of the antebellum south. Part of a class period was devoted to looking at her work and discussing its significance.

To create the silhouettes, the students used costumes and props then took each other's pictures posed as certain stereotypes. Outlines were traced of the student photos onto overhead projector sheets then the images were copied onto black roll paper from the projections. The student's silhouettes showed school stereotypes and figures breaking these stereotypes such as the "Dumb Jock" carrying a math book. These silhouettes were hung in tableaux in our big dance room. The students made colorful environments for their silhouette groupings to inhabit using sharpies on overhead projector sheets. These environments were projected onto the silhouette scenes. The colorful projections included the bullies having cones at the ice cream stand and the Goths planting flowers by the tattoo parlor. The other students from Kindergarten to 12th grade toured this exhibit with the creators as docents. The "Docents" explained stereotyping and why it can be harmful. The presentations were extremely well received with many thoughtful questions at the end. The whole school got an important lesson in not judging a book by its cover.

The Students and Environment

Concord has a student population of just over 300. While predominantly white middle class, the students come from a wide variety of economic levels. 28% qualify for free and reduced lunch while others are the children of professionals. 4% are Native American. 17% are at-risk or title one. 10% have 504 plans. The arts serve as a meeting place for all and we have few issues with cliques or bullying. Our discipline policy is based on the Concord Creed whose tenets include honesty, forgiveness, generosity, respect, kindness, unselfishness and consideration.

The three classes of fifth and sixth graders that participated in our service learning projects were reflective of the school's student body and the community surrounding us. The students are mostly eager and accept the arts as a way to learn about the world. They come from a pretty conservative area but have chosen to be educated in a non-traditional school.

Six students participated in a focus group about service learning. I tried to pick students that would reflect to student body. Some of the students are high achieving, some are poorer students, some art savvy, some not, some leaders, some followers, some shy, some outgoing. I picked three fifth and three sixth grade students, two boys and four girls.

David is a happy, well-rounded fifth grade boy. He gets along with everyone. While he enjoys art it is not his focus. He is a wonderful actor and dancer and enjoyed playing the lead in last year's musical. He qualifies for the lunch program. David worked on the "10 Things You Can Do For The World" project. He was a bit hesitant with the younger students but soon was ripping magazine pictures and happily handing supplies over to the kindergarteners to collage onto the board.

Valerie is a vivacious, bubbly fifth grade student who likes art but thinks of her older sister as the family artist. She frequently comes up with interesting and creative ideas during her process but often requires confidence building. Her parents are professionals. Valerie worked on the “Calendar for Cows” project and was very engaged with the kindergarteners. She appears in many of the photos smiling and talking away. She loved being in a leadership role.

Carrie is a fantastic sixth grade artist whose work is frequently picked for outside shows. She has difficulty in school and recently left her afterschool improvisational acting troupe due to poor grades. Carrie worked on the “10 Things” project. She made and presented her poster, “Give Junk a Home” with finesse. She enjoyed helping the kindergarten build a mural out of bottle caps.

Emily is a sixth grader known to ‘tell it like it is’. She comes from a working class background. She would not describe herself as an artist. She is more interested in competitive figure skating. She worked on the “Stereotype” project. She contributed a beautiful dancer to the “dumb jock” group as a way to break the stereotypes. She was a perceptive presenter who enjoyed questions.

Nat is a sixth grader who does well in school and in art. He is a member of our improvisational acting troupe. He is helpful and kind. Nat worked on the “Calendar for Cows”. He was nervous about relating to the kindergarteners but made a buddy who now high fives him in the hallway.

Ellen is a fifth grader who is art savvy. She is shy and sweet and well liked. She does well in school. Her father and mother are professionals. Ellen worked on the ‘Stereotype’

project. She contributed a “jock” that was reading to the silhouettes. She was shy about the presentation and let others take a leadership role but contributed thoughtful comment.

The Research

Academic research on service learning has brought about several positive outcomes for the students involved in the activities. Service learning has a positive impact on social behaviors. Students engage in less “risky” behaviors. In a study of At Risk students in Delaware (Hecht, 2002) the students described the service-learning program in positive terms and showed increased engagement in school. Attendance at school goes up. Surveys from Learn and Serve in Wisconsin (Kirkham, 2001) reports 97.9% of the teachers who participated in service learning said that students learned more, 46.4% said grades improved and 35.8% said absenteeism decreased. The student’s relationships with teachers, peers and the community are enhanced. Students are better able to communicate with diverse groups. Students become more civic minded. Over fifteen years, students that participated in service learning were more likely to vote. Over 80% of students in quality service learning programs felt they were having a positive impact on the community.

While service-learning students are having a positive impact on the community their grades and performance on standardized testing improve. The Michigan Learn and Serve Study (Billig & Klute, 2003) found that students in grades 2 through 5 who participated in service learning claimed greater levels of behavioral, affective and cognitive engagement in school. They showed statistically significant differences in effort expended, paying attention, completing homework on time and sharing what they learned with others. The 5th graders in this study outperformed non-participating students on the MEAP in science,

writing and social studies. In a Smartworks Incorporated survey two thirds of the students who participated in service learning stated that their participation helped them to understand what they were learning in school. Students become more career aware and develop a greater work ethic. When students participate in well-planned service learning they “develop positive work orientation attitudes and skills” (Weiler, LaGoy, Crane, and Rovner, 1998). Community perception of the school and the students is improved. The Colorado Learn and Serve program (Kim and Billig, 2003) studied 35 classrooms and found that students who participate in service learning have a stronger connection to school and community and a greater sense of civic responsibility than those who do not.

Outcomes and Teaching Practice at Concord Academy Petoskey

Service learning has been a great fit for my school and students. At first I was a little hesitant about the idea. My students are already involved in so many hands on learning projects from plays to dances to puppet shows, I was worried that one more thing may be overwhelming. I was wrong, not only did the students enjoy the experience and learn a lot from it but they are also hoping it will become a regular part of the school curriculum. Interestingly, just as I was taking the service learning class, our new director floated the idea that service learning becomes a required part of our curriculum. I was already three steps ahead, as I was beginning the lesson plans that would result in these three unique and special service-learning projects for my fifth and sixth grade students. Now I am sold and so are my students.

I was not sure how the students would respond to working with the kindergarten but the first thing I heard from the older students as they came in for class was, “Are we

working with the kindergarten today?” As Carrie, who worked on the collaged calendar for ‘Heifer, International’ said, “The best part was working with the kindergarten”. The group who presented their stereotype exhibit to the school agreed with Emily who responded, “It was fun to share with others”. The whole school benefited from their astute presentations. Ellen, who is usually shy and quiet, liked working with people she didn’t know and “sharing our hard work”. She commented that it made her feel good when people asked questions about the exhibit. From the start, the students were open to the idea of working with others.

The older students were amazed by what the kindergarteners were capable of. Carrie was surprised at “how smart they were, he was using really big words.” You can see it on their faces as you look through the pictures of the projects. There is mutual enjoyment but also mutual respect. The fifth and sixth grade students learned as much from and about the kindergarteners as the kindergarteners learned from them. Nat called the kindergarteners “imaginative.” David learned that kindergarteners have ideas too, he mentioned, “Kindergarteners knew what to put where.” Valerie said it best, “The kindergarteners had really good ideas- they added more “WOW””.

All the students in the focus group would like to see more service learning although they were reluctant to go as so far as require it. Unanimously, they thought it was a worthwhile part of the curriculum. Emily said, “It would be fun to meet people around your community.” Valerie agreed, “It would be cool to show people what we can do.” These students found a new way to use their creativity to influence a greater community and they responded with enthusiasm and maturity. We can’t wait till next year.

Conclusion

Having seen what service-learning can do, I am confident about keeping it as a part of my on-going curriculum. We have already made contact with several groups that would be interested in working alongside us in future projects. These groups include the Conservatory, the Community Gardens and the C.S. Lewis Festival. These projects will give us a chance to integrate art with science and language arts classes. One goal I have is to make Concord more visible in the community. A second one is to have students see that art can be part of many different kinds of experiences, it doesn't have to be only personal but have a wider reach. The students are excited to see what projects they will be a part of next year. They are interested in both working with older or younger students within our school population and in working outside of the school walls. My original hesitation has been turned to enthusiasm to see service learning as a continuing part of the Concord Academy experience.

Chapter 3: Making Meaning in Art

“Mrs. Stoppel, Mrs. Stoppel, Come see ours!” chorus an excited group of fifth graders as they run down a sand dune towards me. It is a perfect fall day on the shore of Lake Michigan. As I approach their sculpture, the first thing I notice is the brilliant colors against the backdrop of blue sky and bluer water. Ahead of me is a white birch bark log upright in the sand, meticulously wrapped with red and gold leaves and bound with beach grass. An assortment of collected nature embellishes the bottom. It is enchanting like an ancient offering from some long ago ritual. This is a school field trip based on Change in Nature, a study of artist Andy Goldsworthy. And it is an experience we will never forget.

Content and Purpose

If you are lucky you will take a class that changes your whole outlook. For me, AE 604 is one such class. Teaching Artmaking with Meaning is a class that takes the theories we discussed in our first Mostly Online OSU class, AE 700, and puts them into practice. Those concepts include developing Big Ideas, using contemporary artists and visual culture to inform our artmaking and making personal connections. In our text, *Teaching Meaning in Artmaking*, Sydney Walker defines Big Ideas as “broad, important human issues”. These include concepts such as conflict, power, identity, nature, celebration and heroes. While experimenting with these concepts we produced a body of artwork for ourselves, “The Big Project”. The new ways of creating artwork made an enormous impact on both my teaching and my personal artwork.

Each week we would have a variety of assignments that included responding to questions posed about our reading, creating a web journal, doing artmaking exercises and making artwork. The course followed the wonderful text, a guidebook to teaching meaning that was easy to read, full of useful ideas and well thought out. Over the last two years I have gone back to it for inspiration many times. We learned from our readings to ask essential questions about our Big Ideas. We explored personal connections to our subject. We engaged in knowledge building about our topic and about other artists that are engaged with the same or a similar topic. We wrote about our own process and those of other artists.

To reach deeper into our subject we participated in several artmaking exercises. The first was a series of drawing commands. After drawing nine sketches that related to our chosen topic, we were asked to redraw them responding to several commands, explode, zoom or crop, shrink, take apart, multiply, collaborate to remake and write your own command. The drawing commands were a useful tool that I will use with my older elementary students. I made a couple drawings from that exercise that inspired new artworks.

In my artwork I am intrigued by the idea of looking through things. Looking through things surfaced again with the oppositions exercise. In this exercise we listed pairs of oppositions within our topic and created sketches based on those oppositions. My favorite is a drawing with a tractor that you can see between the trees. This became a boldly colored pastel for my “Big Project”.

I had the most trouble with the play exercise. We were given a list of play strategies including revealing and concealing, time, reversals, disturbance, disguise, substituting and several others. Using as many strategies as we had time for, we made at least three pieces of art. I had some ideas but they would have taken more planning and time. I need to loosen up more, have some fun. I am always so goal-oriented. I never take time for myself. I decided to work on the beach. Drawing on the beach was a good thing for me but it took me forever to really get what I wanted. I was too set on what was going to happen. I wanted to create a long view of our downtown by drawing in the sand. The best part was going into the water to take the pictures. It changed the whole perspective. Instead of the town of Petoskey getting washed away, it was Petoskey sinking...

Our class culminated in a body of work about our chosen Big Idea. My Big Idea was the concept of Place. My topic further defined my work for this class as, "The Effects of Tourism on Place", specifically, my hometown, Petoskey, a small resort town in Northern Michigan on the shores of Lake Michigan.

Personal Artwork

Working with the idea of place and the effects of tourism on place, I needed to find a spot where these two things meet. Recently, a bike path following the Lake Michigan and connecting several tourist towns was completed. This path runs through major developments for the very rich, past fragile slopes and over one recent site of environmental clean up. Not more than five miles from my home, this was the perfect working site for me, but first I needed to get to know it. I focused on the newest section and walked it several times from Bay Harbor (a resort development for the very rich) to

Petoskey, the downtown shopping area. That section is about three miles each way. I painted a pastel on site one nice fall day from an overlook just down from a “Fragile Slope,” near a picnic area overlooking the Lake Michigan shoreline. The view from here was outstanding. Above this view were summer homes of the several million-dollar-variety. While I was working all kinds of people would stop and talk to me.

My concept became to redraw this beautiful view but with the major elements of trees, water, sky changed to symbols of tourism: collages of people, money and summer mansions in a series. However, while I was in the car, I was thinking how the bike path itself was the thing that connected all those things, what if I drew on the bike path itself? I suppose Keith Haring and his subway drawings that we learned about must have been in the back of my mind. I got so excited about the idea I couldn’t wait to pick up my daughter, Petra (14), so she could video tape me drawing right on the bike path. But first I had to pick up my son from a friend’s house. Then we had to get a video camera from school. By the time we drove back to the trail, it started raining. We decided to try again the next day. Unfortunately, it was only 43 degrees so we didn’t have the kind of interaction from the public I would have liked. But we proceeded anyway afraid that if we waited the weather could be worse and the leaves all gone. I painted with pastel chalks on the sidewalk in front of the same view as I had previously pasteled. Between the cold and the friction from drawing on the sidewalk my hands went numb. That was ok because now I could no longer tell if I was scraping my fingers or the pastel on the sidewalk. Only a few people were out braving the cold and only one stopped to talk. Apparently later that day when the sun came out more people came by because one of my third grade students brought me some pastel chips she had collected from the edges of my drawing. Another older student told me that while she

was looking at the chalk painting someone asked her if there were pastels up and down the bike path. Now there is an idea for me ...for the summer! Weeks later I showed one of my 4th grade classes my video and they told me the pastel was still there. That was after days of rain. I was hoping they would be less permanent.

Next I started the series with the tourism elements substituted for the natural elements. I used the original view but replaced the trees with collages of people's faces. People are the first elements of tourism. Our population goes from 6,000 in the off-season to 24,000 in season. I made files of both black-and-white and color magazine clippings of people. The three birch trees are from black and white magazine photos. The birch trees came together very well but the pine was difficult. Obviously people don't come in green and I didn't want to alter the magazine pictures so I found pictures of people that had a little green in the background or in clothing. I also added a bit of green foliage from a clipping so the tree wouldn't fade into the beach.

In my second piece in the series now called, "Bike Path Overlook", money substitutes for the water. Here was a real dilemma. It is illegal to destroy government property, therefore illegal to rip money for my art. So what should I use instead? Photocopied money? Play money? These options just didn't say what I wanted. The Lake brings the money. People pour money into boating. Money means business, taxes, the rich, all things that come with tourism. Your taxes go up if you have a view and skyrocket if you have water front property. Homes used to be passed from generation to generation. Subsequent generations can no longer afford the taxes. Small cottages are replaced with mega mansions. Once middle class people could afford a place on the Lake. Now only the very

rich can afford these homes. Only real money would do. My son and his friends sure got excited as I ripped up five \$1 bills.

The money was more difficult to glue down but I loved the color and texture for the water. It wasn't easy to pastel the pine tree over the money, the money kept falling off as I worked this part. I changed the colors in the composition making it more blue and less yellow to go with the color of money. I was very happy with this piece. I just hope I don't get arrested for it!

Number three in "Bike Path Overlook" has so many options for the houses in the sky. There is the newspaper real estate section, glossy mags by real estate companies or pictures clipped from Better Homes and Gardens. After much deliberation, I decided on the newspaper for two reasons. First, I liked that it was a local paper. Second, I was able to pastel the tree foliage right on the newspaper. I thought the houses should reflect the sky's perspective: larger higher on the page, smaller at the horizon, the exact opposite of how we usually see houses in perspective. This was the hardest piece to collage. I would set it up and then pull it apart to glue it. I never found as many fancy houses, as I wanted; they are in the glossy magazines. But finally I did get it together. Overall, I think this was my least successful piece. It worked as part of the series but I am not sure it stands well on it's own.

These pieces were drawn from the opposition of Land vs. Development. Each part of the land has been exchanged for an element of development. I looked at my work from the visual exercises and found that many of them were also oppositions, the strongest being the two trees you look between to find a tractor. I decided this was the basis for an artwork. I thought intensifying the colors would emphasize the differences between the two

elements, so the trees became blue, the tractor yellow over red edges. I can see doing a few more of these and loosening them up a bit. These were the works that became my “Big Project”.

Ideas to Practice

Big Ideas fit perfectly into Concord Academy Petoskey’s philosophy of integrating arts and academics. Our approach becomes even more solidified when using an overarching Big Idea. One of my most successful projects using this concept was a fieldtrip to the Petoskey State Park. Collaborating with the Science, Language Arts and Outdoor Education teachers, we selected our Big Idea: Change in Nature. Before going, the students studied the artwork of Andy Goldsworthy. They looked for patterns and themes in his work. His process was discovered through a slide show guessing game. The students were especially interested in the idea of letting Nature take its course after the artwork was complete. At the park, we broke the 5th and 6th grade students into 6 groups that would rotate through activities. These included writing nature Haikus, participating in a hike on shoreline topography, learning stewardship, gathering materials and creating Goldsworthy style artworks.

We held the fieldtrip on a beautiful fall day in October. The trees were just beginning to turn, berries were dropping from the bushes, the sky was clear. For my activity, groups of students would make artworks based on ideas from their study of Andy Goldsworthy. The work must be site specific, using only natural materials and related to our big idea. The students picked various sites including dunes, shoreline, woods, and a moss covered copse. After gathering materials during the previous rotation on stewardship, the students began their artwork. Some students were interested in Goldsworthy’s use of concentric circles

and arranged patterns of various colored berries on humps of bright green moss or placed different colored circles of leaves and stones. Some were interested in contrast and chose to work with white birch bark on the shadowy forest floor or with dark holes against bright sand and leaves. Others were interested in forces and played with the idea of sand sliding or waves rearranging their piece. The artwork was carefully photographed and documented.

The students wrote about Andy Goldsworthy and their own work when we got back to the classroom. One student commented on the fact that “they had not realized that art could be made from such humble things”. Devin was excited about the impermanence aspect. They were happy that art could be made anywhere. Carly wrote, “Goldsworthy gets all his ideas from the season, weather and location and we did, too.” Becca noted in her paper, “Goldsworthy says, ‘I never mark my work on a map, people have to hear about them through word of mouth’ I found out that Andy only uses his mind, imagination and hands. He never wants people to come with him because he wants them to find it [the artwork] by accident.” We were all excited to think that people might “discover” our artwork. Every student felt success at the process. One student got so turned on they bought the *River and Tides* (2004) video about Andy Goldsworthy.

Using contemporary artists in my teaching was a big light bulb for me. My first degree was in Art History, but that was thirty years ago. Most of the “contemporary” artists we had studied in my classroom were from the fifties and sixties. It was time I freshened it up. In our OSU class we learned about Pepon Osorio, Shirin Neshat, Sandy Skolund and others.

Since my wake up call not only have I included Andy Goldsworthy but Mark Bradford, Kara Walker, Shahzia Sikander, Joseph Cornell and Robin Rhodes in my curriculum.

The Kara Walker project was presented under the Big Idea of Identity and more specifically, Stereotype. The project was introduced with a discussion of school stereotypes and bias. Film clips from the television show, "Glee" were shown to demonstrate stereotyping. We made posters of each school stereotype we identified. All the students went around the posters and added descriptive words or phrases to the poster. We then asked if any of us think we fit perfectly into any of these descriptions. "No!" was the resounding answer. First impressions were discussed and how we make judgments about others based on looks and clothing. "Bias" was defined. The next class period the students were introduced to the work of Kara Walker. Kara Walker explores the idea of "Negress" by using the centuries-old technique of silhouette to question the stereotypes of the antebellum south. Her work often contains narratives about the struggles for power, white vs. black, master vs. slave, and man vs. woman, young vs. old. . Kara Walker believes, "The silhouette says a lot with very little information, but that's also what the stereotype does. So I saw the silhouette and the stereotype as linked. Of course, while the stereotype, or the emblem, can communicate with a lot of people, and a lot of people can understand it, the other side is that it also reduces differences, reduces diversity to that stereotype." By including Kara Walker in my unit the students were exposed to stereotyping in artworks that question the appropriateness of these stereotypes. This led to discussion of whether the stereotypes that are prevalent today were appropriate.

After deciding on what school stereotypes to use on our project, the students were put in groups of four. Each group would make a scene of silhouettes representing a particular school stereotype. However, their scene would break the stereotype. An example of this was the “Dumb Jock” with a math book or the “Bully” giving a child ice cream. To make the silhouettes, the students brought in props and clothing and took each other’s pictures in specific the poses for their scene. The pictures were traced onto overhead projector sheets and projected onto black paper. They were traced life-size and carefully cut out. Lastly the students made colorful overhead projections of the setting for their silhouettes. All of the groupings were setup in our large dance room. We then had an exhibit where the creators acted as docents and presented a powerful lesson on stereotypes for the entire school. The videotapes of the exhibit revealed confident students fielding questions from younger and older students. Madelyn said it best when she stated, “I don’t want to be put into a box or like these silhouettes be thought of as so one-sided”. Not only could the students explain stereotyping and bias but also why it can be hurtful. Megan revealed that she was a victim of stereotyping in her old school. People thought this creative thinker was “Emo” because she liked to wear black. Art was now teaching more than aesthetics and technique.

Under the Big Idea of Story, the third and fourth grade students studied the work of Shahzia Sikander. Using the knowledge base built on her work and that of traditional Middle Eastern Miniature paintings, the students created paintings based on stories from their own culture. We used stories that have been passed down through generations, namely fairytales. This was a school-wide theme that would feature a “Fairytale Ball”. We started by brainstorming a list of fairytales that were at least 100 years old and known to most people in our culture. The biggest problem I had was the student’s reliance on Disney

versions of the fairytales. Their classroom teachers read several non-Disney tales to help the students understand how the stories have been passed down. Next the students made sketches of their ideas. To reference the work of Sikander, their final painting would have a gold sponge painted border but an element of their design had to extend out of the border. To replicate the highly patterned work, the student's final water colored paintings included a pattern in gel pen on all parts. This Big Idea helped the students explore how people around the world have much in common. We talked about what lesson might be learned from their fairytale. Peyton was interested to find Cinderella stories in so many cultures. Rachel combined the fairytales of Jack and the Beanstalk and Puss in Boots for an exciting look at symbols in story. Gwen told me that making art was like her depiction of Rumpelstiltskin spinning straw into gold. These third and fourth grade artworks are sophisticated examples of what can be taught in an Elementary classroom.

Another facet of AE 604 was making personal connections. While working with the Big Idea of Identity the students explored this concept by making Inside Outside Boxes. We referenced three artists, Joseph Cornell, local artist Len Cargill and myself. The students started by making two columns on a piece of paper. On one side they listed the traits of their outside self, the self that everyone sees. The second column was for their inside self, the side that few people know. The students chose a box from an assortment of various sizes and shapes. The outside of the box would represent the artist's outside self but the inside would be the more secret personal self. The students used a variety of materials including photographs, fabric, papers, paint, toys, wooden pieces, ribbon, pipe cleaners and sculpty. In the student critiques, Haley revealed that "I was shy, girly, nosy, bright and loving on the outside but the inside is a totally different story." At home she can be a witch.

Her box shows just that, Haley dressed as a witch. Emily's work includes a handmade book. Her critique spells out, "My book represents that I want to become a writer. In the book is a picture of me and my friend as super heroes, because I would do almost anything for my friends." Noah made a box that shows his nerdy exterior. People assume he is smart and bookish but improvisational acting is his love. Kylie showed her box as always open though people assume she is shy and quiet. Julia's critique is especially poignant, "On the outside I am a happy-go-lucky girl and get extremely irritated when I see people being treated unkind. Bright colors and pleasant objects decorate the outside of my box however a glint of my shadowy personal life is seeping through the opening. I would prefer you not look inside. It is very heavy, horrible and personal." Art gave these students a place to reflect on themselves, good and bad.

Changes in My Own Work

My students' artwork wasn't the only work benefitting from the use of the concepts taught in AE 607, Teaching Artwork with Meaning. As a result of this class, my own artwork took on the Big Idea of Change and Non-permanence. I began working directly on the bike path starting with that first piece that survived for weeks through rain and even snow. Kids would come in and report that they went to see it. I think more kids saw that piece than would have if it were in our local art center or a gallery. I have never had such a response to an artwork. It started with third grader Laney Whitcomb, bringing in bits of pastel she found on the bike path the day I drew it. When one of my students told me they were asked by a passer-by if there were more pastels on the bike path, it gave me the idea of doing a series on the bike path all in one day. The following summer found me hunched over the

path, pastels in hand, as bikes whizzed past. People stopped and chatted. It became a weekly thing. My picture appeared in the local paper. The Art Center asked me to draw on the bike path for their “Paint Out” event. I spent the summer making non-permanent artwork that everyone sees. And now my work is in a local restaurant.....on chalkboards that will be wiped clean. This summer Petoskey will have its first Chalk Festival with me as their featured artist!

Reflection

Our first week we were asked, “Why do artists make art?” This question was the essential idea of the class. Why do we make art and what can our art say to others? I have always been one to make pretty pictures, pastel landscapes of various places I have been. Of course there is a place for that and always will be, but art can go further. This class challenged me to look at my art as a vehicle for discussion of issues as diverse as body image, man vs. nature and human rights. Art can make you think. Art can make you want to act. The History of Art is full of people who stirred the pot. The “Masters” would challenge conventions: making people think, drawing commentary, painting interpretation. Even when their patron was the church, they would push accepted boundaries, they would respond to the events of the day, to war, to scientific discoveries, to social issues and they would find a way to make meaning.

Once we started working with Big Ideas in the classroom, it gave our work a whole new emphasis. Students were able to dig a little deeper. They cared about their work more when they thought about it more. In a focus group Becca said, “When I knew I could use art to send a message it became more important”. Devin stated that he could show others what

he was thinking with his art. Carly liked Big Ideas because it helped her “put things in place.”

Jasper Johns said to “Do something, then do something else and then do something else”. I found with my own work that once I started working, the ideas started flowing. It was as if the process of doing turned on the creative machine. I would have an idea and need to get started on it right away. That was especially true of the video of myself drawing on the bike path. It didn’t matter that it was 40 degrees out. I just had to do it while the excitement was there.

It was the same with the kids. As soon as we started talking about the Big Idea, the ideas started percolating. Bryan knew just where “he wanted to go with his art.” When we would come up with essential questions, the students would be completely engaged. The hands would go up and even the shyest would want to participate. They were bringing what they learned in their other classes into the art class and making connections between art and the world around them. We were able not only to integrate math, science, language arts and social studies into the art room but issues of ethics and character. The art room became the point where all things intersected. Art was a viable and vital part of the curriculum not just a place to make pretty pictures. And isn’t that what we want for our kids?

Chapter 4: Conclusion

What can art teach? The answer to this question was broadened by my participation in the Mostly Online Master's program through Ohio State University's Art Education Department. The art room isn't just for making pretty pictures but for learning and reacting to the concerns of living in the 21st century. We can teach our students to think for themselves, think out of the box and solve problems. We can help to synthesize their knowledge in other areas. When students are engaged in the Big Idea, they care more about their work. Students think deeper when learning about artists that are living here and now and seeing how those artists inform their art with the same issues that the students care about. Their art takes on special meaning when it comes from an idea that is important to them.

When I decided to get my Master's degree I knew I wanted a program that I could really sink my teeth in. I didn't want to just jump through hoops; I wanted to push my teaching to a new level. From the very first class with the Mostly Online Master's program I felt I was learning new things. That was true with every class, starting with AE 700 taught by Dr. Sydney Walker. I was impressed how all the classes reiterated the main themes of Big Ideas, contemporary artists, visual culture and personal connections. These are concepts that I am now and will continue to use in my classroom every day. In a world where communication is done in video clips and provocative images, Dr Sydney Walker's question, "What if this is the last art class they ever take?" is especially significant. How will our students navigate through the onslaught of images they see everyday without the visual savvy that art brings. What do they need to know now in order to make informed

choices later? I plan to continue to introduce my students to artists working today and to the visual culture in which they are engulfed. I will guide my students through Big Ideas so they can make art with meaning.

The next class, AE 604, Artmaking with Meaning,, taught by Dr. Jack Richardson, took the concepts that we talked about in Dr. Walker's class and put them into practice. My own art took on new meaning. My projects with students became richer in content. In essence the students learned more than art concepts in art class. They learned to discover the world, to uncover the issues and to speak with their art. Several art projects were born in that class which later developed into meaningful units. These include my Andy Goldsworthy field trip and a science-based sculpture garden for our school.

AE 640, Critical Dialogue about Art and Aesthetics, followed Terry Barrett's excellent texts *Interpreting Art: Reflecting, Wondering, and Responding* (2003) and *Talking about Student Art* (1997). They are chalk-full of ideas to use when speaking about art in the classroom. From Mr. Barrett's books I found sound advise on how to enrich the Inside/Outside box project that was part of my 6th grade curriculum. I now include with this lesson the wonderful interpretation ideas presented in these books. We all come away knowing more about ourselves but also we learn how to make our meaning clear. Interpretation is an area of growth for me. I will be spending more time next year reviewing these books and including more opportunities for my students to talk and write about their art. I am trying to incorporate more analysis in my classroom both of Master artists and our own work. This is an area in which I hope to become more proficient.

During AE 607 Curriculum, taught by Dr. Jennifer Eisenhauer, I wrote up my stereotype unit. This proved to be one of my most successful units of the year. Our work affected the whole school and started a dialogue on stereotyping and bias within the school community. I am planning on continuing projects that have a social issue aspect that can involve the whole school and possibly the larger community.

The big changes that I made due to Dr. Parson's Assessment class, AE 731, were to add a writing component to my portfolios and to use them for assessing personal growth. Since I started teaching 16 years ago I have had the students keep portfolios. I did this for a number of reasons, none of them being to assess artwork. I kept them so the students would have a neat place to keep their artwork from day to day. I kept them so I could find things to put up in our various art shows. I kept them for our student-led conferences. And I kept them so I could refer to them if parents had questions or concerns through the year. What an opportunity I was missing: the most important reason to keep a portfolio and I wasn't using it.

I am an advocate of assessing the students on their own personal growth, how does each artwork measure up to the capabilities of this particular student, but how many times do I actually go back and prove my assessment? I had the tool at hand and never used it. The students themselves can do the work for me and have an opportunity to reflect on their work and their process, another thing I have neglected to have them do. As Charlotte Danielson and Leslye Abrutyn say in *The Benefits of Portfolios* (1997), "Far more of the student work is evaluated through self-assessment, rather than teacher assessment." While I have had my students critique certain pieces at the end of a unit, I have not had them

reflect on their portfolio as a whole. How silly of me. Portfolio days are always so exciting. Students are picking their best works for art shows. The mood is positive and the students are eager. I could easily use this excitement to have students reflect on their work. This will also cause students to reevaluate and revise their work more carefully. Charlotte Danielson and Leslye Abrutyn (1997) state that when they have been evaluating their own portfolios “students often engage in preliminary self-evaluation and revision to ensure that the pieces are as good as they can be from the outset.” Dr Parsons was right when he said, “The way you assess can change your curriculum.”

My biggest surprise was Dr. Karen Hutzel’s AE 767, called Critical Analysis of Multicultural Art Education: Theory and Practice. From the title of this course I thought I would be learning about the art of different cultures around the world, something I thrive on. When I found out it was about service learning I was skeptical. Now I am sold on service learning and plan to keep it as an important part of my curriculum. After having accomplished three successful projects this past year I am ready for a bigger, more comprehensive project. A project to create a natural science outdoor classroom with a mile long corridor to the Nature path at our local community college is in the works. We will be working with both the college and the Conservancy that holds the property involved. To go along with this will be a science related sculpture garden. The work will be done cross generation with older students working with younger students, college students and adults.

AE 705 Research was another class I was apprehensive about, having never engaged in research of this type. The thing that most struck me was how easy it is to do research in your classroom, how easy it is to see if you are on the right track. I do an art auction every

year to raise funds for the art department. This year one of the classes made wall hangings similar to those I had seen at a gallery this summer. While some of the hangings were great, many of them were rather disappointing. Later I had the same class make mosaic pots for the auction. These are spectacular. I sat down with the boys in the class and we talked about why they liked the one project but not the other. They were completely open about talking to me about the projects since I had “brought it up,” but they never would have told me, “I don’t like this project,” if I hadn’t asked. Doing research with the people most affected by your teaching only makes good sense.

The arts are uniquely qualified to help teach the skills identified by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2010). The learning I have had through the Mostly Online program will make me a better teacher of these skills: critical thinking, problem solving, communication, collaboration, creativity, innovation, information and media literacy, technology literacy, flexibility and adaptability, initiative and adaptability, social and cross-cultural skills, productivity and accountability, and leadership and responsibility. I look forward to using my new knowledge to inspire others to hone these traits.

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